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# The Migrant's Quest Home.

Caribbean Identity in the Diaspora.

12/19/2011

Tobian Banton

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# INTRODUCTION

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Established through migration mostly to England and America, the Caribbean Diaspora is a continuous trend over hundreds of years resulting in a large dislocated and multigenerational population. Participants of the female Caribbean Diaspora experience identity negotiations on a grander scale: the islander becomes the traveler seeking redemption away from the poverty and lack of opportunity of her homeland, while the traveler finds stability in a new land and establishes himself as a migrant. Whether the migrant finds future success or failure, there is a persistent longing for the homeland he left. The missing connection to the grassroots of her identity can only be achieved by returning to the place where it all began. He now becomes the returnee. “Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home” (Conde 2). The cycle of the islander to the returnee will continue because of the economic instability of the islands. The migration will flow heavily towards a new land with only a trickle returning to establish the homeland. The migrant’s quest for identity continues as the diaspora widens.

This paper is a quest to identify the change in identity relevant to a Caribbean Diaspora by exploring the diaspora’s effects on migrants through conversations with literary texts by Caribbean female authors. These authors have similar stories and offer a first person perspective with a maternalistic view. The mother-daughter dynamic heightens the relationship between the islander and the island and the bond that cannot be severed. Gender, transculturation and hybridity derived from the author’s personal association with the diaspora, allows for a fuller understanding of the challenges of a Caribbean identity. The islander’s circumstances change and this dictates how she is perceived and how she perceives the world. My scope includes novel Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* and *Annie John*, Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *To Da-*

*Duh in Memoriam* and Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*. These novels offer the perspectives of a child protagonist growing up, coming of age, becoming a young adult who leaves the island, realizes the complexity of the social structure she inhabits and yearns for a reconnection with the homeland.

The significance of a child narrator is to provide the audience with an untainted and pure seeing eye. "The child notices and records all [with a naïve eye]... to present the absurdities of the educational system [and] the social structures." (Balutansky 653) The unbiased perspective of a child offers more general relatable concepts versus an adult's opinionated personal circumstance. The free range of the child's perspective is an aim to give the audience a panoramic view of Caribbean culture. Each child's story holds similar trajectories identifying their struggles as universal among the islands. The child becomes a symbol of the infancy of the island's culture and identity in a colonial influenced society. These novels show growth in a heavily foreign- influenced island and the outcomes that may arise.

# THE ISLANDER

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The island is more than a picture perfect sunset, more than pristine beaches and white sand. It is more than smiling faces and sweet catch phrases. It is deep, it is rooted, and it is a history that is embedded in the soul of its people. It is sugar cane fields and yam hills. It is rivers that run deep and trees that tower high. It is hills and valleys, tribes and settlers. Full knowledge of the island is not available to the foreigner because the island dwells inside its owner, the islander. Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy, like many islanders, becomes offended when foreigners claim "they had somehow all been to the islands – by that, they meant the place where [she] was from – and had fun there." (Kincaid 65) Denoting the island as a place for fun, severs the reverence the islander has for her homeland. Reducing the island to a playground, a fun experience, robs it of all it's worth. The island now becomes a playground, a place that holds no worth to all that see it. This is offensive to most islanders who value the island as the foundation on which their identity stands. The island has a complicated and deep-rooted history that cannot be experienced but has to be passed down through ancestral blood; the basis of the islander's identity. Her identity is challenged at an early age with the influence of a colonial-inspired curriculum.

The islander first experiences the European influence as a child learning to read and write. The very first lesson is of an alphabet that is un-relatable, distant and foreign. Merle Hodge explores the education system through Cynthia's school encounters. Cynthia describes her reading career which began with "A for Apple, the exotic fruit that made its brief appearance at Christmas-time, and pursued through my Caribbean Reader Primer One the fortunes and circumstances of two English children..." (Hodge 25) The curriculum establishes the power of the European culture, language and literature while denouncing the relevance of the homeland. A curriculum engineered by an old colonial empire, teaches the foreign way as the way of the

civilized. The island's language and concepts are forbidden in the classroom and cursed as ignorant and unrefined. Cynthia expresses vagueness with the content of "recited nursery rhymes about Little Boy Blue (what, in all creation, was a "haystack"?) and about Little Miss Muffet who for some unaccountable reason sat eating her curls away." (Hodge 25) Teaching island children of 'haystacks' and 'curds and whey' rather than 'pimento bushels' and 'suga n wata' reinforces the idea that what they know and can relate to is irrelevant and uncivilized. 'Haystacks', stacks of dried grass stored for animal consumption in the winter, and 'curds and whey' a by-product of cow's milk, are not authentic tropical island concepts. Island children have no knowledge of or experience with them in their daily lives. Using more relatable concepts such as 'pimento bushels, stacks of pimento branches collected for the manufacturing of the pimento spice, and 'suga n wata', a simple, sweet beverage of cane sugar and water, creates greater appreciation for the island. Localized relatable concepts increase the children's ability to process information and learn.

Lessons of foreign lands inspire the children to reach for this ideal place where education, intelligence, great mobility and social advancement are created. The child must abandon her island beliefs for foreign ones in order to learn efficiently, graduate and progress in society; a gradual move that forces her out of the country. The education system offers no sanctuary for a true island upbringing. All island experiences are disowned for educational advancement. Cynthia experiences the importance of the foreign culture when she is punished for not knowing what sleet is. "Once in a dictation nearly the whole class had either spelt 'sleet' wrong or left an inglorious blank, and he had lined us up and given us each three with the tamarind-whip for not knowing how to spell it, and six more because none could offer any suggestion as to what 'sleet' might be." (Hodge 67) This episode reinforces the dominance of a foreign culture. The

nonexistence of sleet, a mixture of snow and ice, in the tropical Caribbean suggests the importance of a strange, foreign custom and the irrelevance of the island. The use of the tamarind-whip, a flexible young branch from a tamarind tree which grows in abundance on the islands, to distribute punishment reinforces the idea that products of the island bear negative connotations and induces fear. Children are taught to discard all identifying traits from home and strive for a more European identity.

Jamaica Kincaid expressed the impact that growing up in the British colonial tradition and reading literature like John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and The Bible has had on her writing. She became "aware of the influence of the things [she] read as a child—images from Christian mythology and *Paradise Lost*... [She] memorized Wordsworth when [she] was a child, Keats, all sorts of things. It was an attempt to make me into a certain kind of person." (Bonetti 2-3) The influence of British literature forced her to abandon her island identity and attach meaning to foreign works. Kincaid acknowledges the pressure of being a different person that the European curriculum called for. The impact lasts forever and the islander is forever changed. The islander's identity is no longer pure; she is forced to deny any connection or involvement that sustains the homeland.

Merle Hodge's Cynthia is bombarded with the same disassociation techniques and at a young age is forced to create a dual identity, who she gives a European name, Helen. Helen became Cynthia's "Proper Me... [Cynthia] was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness." (Hodge 62) The use of a double identity emphasizes the escape needed in order to exist. Helen becomes the true identity; the one that does right in the eyes of society. Helen allows Cynthia to inhabit a space that enjoys "things like warming before a fire and having tea at four o'clock," granting her access to traditions that are customary for Europeans. (Hodge 62) The unrealism of warming



before a fire and afternoon tea in a tropical climate escapes the reality of the child who is so inundated with European influence. The imposition of the foreign cultural system beginning with a powerful force of education creates distaste for the homeland and a false notion of what is real. Cynthia was bombarded with European culture in places she was most vulnerable: the education system, religion and food. She spoke of “beings whose validity loomed at you out of every book, every picture, the beings whose exemplary aspect it was that shone forth to recommend at you every commodity proposed to your daily preference, from macaroni to the Kingdom of Heaven.”(Hodge 62) Hodge’s mention of macaroni and Kingdom of Heaven suggests the wide range of foreign cultural influence. Macaroni, a staple imported to the island has become an integral part of the homeland’s dietary supplement. Food, necessary for the sustenance of life, is the most intimate form of cultural consumption. Partaking in foreign food practices and adopting it as an island custom enhances the dominance of a foreign culture. Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy also experiences the influence of macaroni when she is confronted by its many forms. In England, she visits a restaurant where “they served macaroni in many sizes and shapes and with all sorts of sauces, only it wasn’t called macaroni but a name foreign to me, and so I felt false saying it that way” (Kincaid 156). Her ownership of macaroni is defined only by the name and not the many variations of pasta which creates a moment of distrust in the new. Changing macaroni to this new name modifies the relationship she has with what she knows from the island, with what she believes is real. Her falseness stems from her adapting to the new cultural influences in this new environment.

Kingdom of Heaven suggests a religious European influence that persists even after death. With constant associations between the foreign land and heaven, the islander relates the journey abroad as a deliverance from a life of hardship. Merle Hodge’s Cynthia recalls her father’s

journey to England as one that he would never return from. His arrival was such a joyous one that nothing could get him “back on that ship – he think he reach the Golden Gates.” (Hodge 64) England’s port represented the Golden Gates for many islanders who sought to escape the poverty of their homeland. This was the only deliverance that the islander could conceive. Cynthia explained being taught in school the association between “Glory and The Mother Country and Up-There and Over-There [as] all one and the same geographical location.” (Hodge 30). The connection between England and Heaven reinforces the influence on the European culture on the identity of the islander. Her religious concepts are contaminated by the lure of a foreign land that will change the islander’s circumstance, offering great prosperity and wealth. The reality and hardship of the foreign land is never known to the islander manipulating her to believe that the foreign land is indeed heaven.

Religious influences controls numerous aspects of an individual’s life and affects lifestyle, morals and thought process. It encompasses body and soul, suggesting total control. Food and religion enhances the ultimate foreign cultural influence over a body, both inward and out. Cynthia discusses her time in Sunday School where all the children were “given a little card with a picture and a Bible verse – pictures of children with yellow hair standing around Jesus... with yellow rays emanating stiffly from all these personages, or children and their faces upturned towards some kind of sun.” (Hodge 30) White children standing around Jesus teaches Cynthia her place as a little Black child is not in glorious Heaven. She is faced with a religion that pushes the salvation of white souls while condemning black sin. In Sunday School, the children sang:

Till I cross the wide, wide water, Lord  
My black sin washed from me,  
Till I come to Glory Glory, Lord  
And cleansed stand beside Thee,  
White and shining stand beside Thee, Lord,

Among Thy Blessed children... (Hodge 30)

The European influence through hymns and art forces the islander to disown her own identity and accept a salvation that denies her redemption. This European religion contaminates the truth of Christianity with racism and teaches children from a young age the social structure of society. The dominance of foreign cultures infiltrated every aspect of the children's lives through education, religion, food consumption and mass media. Foreign culture manifested itself as a reality to hope for, a reality that could not exist in their present circumstance, but a reality that must be attained. The island offers no remedy for this longing and cannot suffice. The European based curriculum aims for an easy integration into a European land. It offers a preview of what life is like abroad and prepares the islander for full immersion.

Seeing foreign places in books and on television captures the minds of young students who dream of seeing more than what they are afforded on small islands. The constant lure of a life of luxury and prosperity places the assets of the foreign land on an unreachable pedestal. The access to books often manufactured in a foreign land lured the islander to a place of fantasy. Merle Hodge's Cynthia fascination with books "transported [her] always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighing and built snowmen." (Hodge 61) Cynthia creates a world with concepts that are not feasible in a tropical climate. She dreams of winter related activities and a lifestyle that the island cannot provide. The joy of the foreign lifestyle captivates her young imagination and grows into a longing for the foreign land. The islander creates an alternate reality with foreign images and has high expectations of seeing them in real life. These images have hopes and dreams attached to them; these are places that hold the islander's future aspirations. Very often, the simplicity and normalcy of the foreign reality cannot live up to the islander's fantasy. Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy

“read of this lake in geography books, had read of its origins and its history, and now to see it up close was odd, for it looked so ordinary, gray dirty, unfriendly, not a body of water to make up a song about.”(Kincaid 35) Lucy’s disappointment is one that many Caribbean natives can relate to. It is common to idolize foreign lands and stories as is taught in schools, which always leads to a disappointing revelation of how common and ordinary these things are. Understanding the simplicity of once grand monuments ignites many questions of reality and fantasy for the islander. In an interview, Jamaica Kincaid expressed the impact of foreign imagery and its deception on her childhood.

When I was about ten years old I read *Jane Eyre*, and at one point she describes the evening as the “gloaming.” She’s describing something English, something I would never see until I was thirty-odd years old. I got stuck on that word, and eventually found a way to use it in...[my] stories, because it freed me of an obsession with a certain kind of language. (Bonetti 3)

Reading *Jane Eyre*, a novel about British residents, exposed Kincaid to words and concepts she could not relate to. Kincaid only understood the author’s intent when she journeyed to England and witnessed the ‘gloaming evening’ in person. The British language in *Jane Eyre* imprisoned Kincaid, who as an aspiring author aimed to be on the same plateau as English writer Charlotte Bronte. The standard was set by an educational system that insisted on teaching children about the lives and tribulations of Europeans. Learning a European based curriculum influenced Kincaid’s career as an author by creating a “desire for a perfect place, a perfect situation, [which] comes from English Romantic poetry. It described a perfection which [she] longed for, and of course the perfection that [she] longed for was England.” (Bonetti 3) Books Kincaid read as a child skewered her perspective of perfection and influenced her ability to write with an authentic

voice. She grew understanding her writing voice to be European influenced and the only place to perfect her craft is in England. However, being there erased the fantasies she had of this foreign land and ignited a search for her own untainted voice. She recognized the European culture as a “big influence, and it was important for [her] to get rid of it. Then [she] could actually look at the place [she] was from.” (Bonetti 3) Kincaid acknowledged the impact of the foreign culture on her Caribbean experience and sought to remove the veil it had on her reality. Being in England was the only way she could put things into perspective and see her own identity clearly.

My migrant experience of Grand Central Station forced me to rename it in my mind. There was nothing ‘grand’ about it; in fact, it was actually smaller than the camera angles of pictures seen on television programs had me believe. The shuffle and bustle of the station deflected from its magnificent design, as no one took the time to engage in its beauty. A circle of ten tourists were being given a tour, but for the masses they seemed to be an obstacle interrupting the flow of traffic. Always referred to as a piece of art, the central lobby boasted grand stairways, long tunnels and a restaurant perched on top a balcony. To enjoy the full experience of Grand Central Station, I assumed would be to dine there, to savor the tastes of New York while watching New Yorkers move along their day. However, the cost at dining at such a place reserved its seats for those of the upper class and so I was shuffled down to the basement food court to dine with others in my income bracket. Tucked in a corner deli, squeezed in between four narrow tables, a view of gray wall to my left and a sea of bobbing heads , I sat sipping my \$5 dollar Orange Juice (which outside of Manhattan would be \$1.50) reflecting on this ‘grand’ experience. The reality of a fantasy that was heavily influenced by what was read and seen is an awakening that all migrants experience. Having a personal experience with the foreign fantasies is the only way to identify them as illusions that veil the truth of what is really important and valuable, the island.

The journey abroad becomes essential in the unveiling of the islander's reality; a necessary step in her own claiming of self.

Paule Marshall's *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* offers the unique perception of an eight year old narrator whose association with the foreign land is a stark contrast with her grandmother's love for the homeland. While the grandmother brags about the beauty of the sugar cane fields, the narrator thinks of them as "giant weeds that have overrun the island, leaving scarcely any room... I longed then for the familiar: for the street in Brooklyn where I lived." (Nunez 194) The narrator's disowning of the homeland is an assertion of the foreign land as her homeland and her identity. The grandmother, who spent her whole life on the island, felt it necessary to bring the narrator around the island teaching her about the nature of the island. The comparison between the island and the foreign land, between an "incredibly tall royal palm... which soared high above the trees" and the Empire State Building, was the narrator's attempt to disvalue anything belonging to the island. (Nunez199) The iconic symbolism of the Empire State Building, like Grand Central Station, is a reflection of the foreign influence on the island. The grandmother's death during the invasion of foreign planes that with their "menacing silver shapes would hurl themselves in an ecstasy of self-immolation onto the land" forces the narrator to rethink her disowning of the island. The narrator atones for her actions through paintings of "seas of sugarcane and huge swirling Van Gogh suns and palm trees striding like brightly plumed Tutsi warriors across a tropical landscape." (Nunez 202) The narrator attempts to recreate and reconnect to the homeland her grandmother had taught her. The narrator returns to the foreign land with a new appreciation for the island and a new vision of its relevance and value in her life. The journey to the island is essential for the narrator to discover her identity amid the hustle and bustle of the city.

# THE TRAVELER

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The journey to the foreign land is a joyous occasion for the islander. Her opportunity for change begins with this moment and her destination is a land that bears endless possibilities. Leaving home is a necessary and inevitable choice. There is no successful future on the island and leaving home becomes the only way. It requires saying goodbye, for now or forever, to all that is known. The islander decides to board a vessel becoming a passenger with no control over her journey or identity; which will be changed forever. The loss her body's control is analogous to the unpredictability of her outcome in the new land. Her journey propels her into a future of limitless possibilities as she loses a sense of her true identity. This is a sacrifice the islander is willing to make, since the connection that is broken is thought to be restorable. But can the relationship between home and self sustain time and distance?

The journey abroad is travelled over endless seas where no land mass, which once represented stability and rootedness, is seen. Separation is immediate. Anticipation, anxiety, sorrow and loss are a few of the sentiments that surface as the passenger, along with her identity, is being carried along and fully immersed into a new world. The journey is essential to the success of many islanders whose career opportunities do not exist in the islands. Jamaica Kincaid claims "she would never have become a writer if she had not broken away from the power of ...the culture of Antigua, where West Indian residents were not writers." (Holmes 116) Kincaid along with numerous Caribbean authors are forced out of the homeland because of the lack of opportunity in the islands. Caribbean authors who often write about island life and identity have no market for their work on the island. Consumers of Caribbean literature are inhabitants of the foreign land; the same land the islander must travel to. Marlene Nourbese Philip, a writer from Tobago now living in Canada, has pointed out that "growing up in the Caribbean, you grow up

knowing that you're going to leave home. For one thing, the societies are too small to absorb all their trained people, so you have to leave." (Conde 2) Leaving becomes the only option for growth, success and self-fulfillment; an anticipated and welcomed change that few islanders get to make. Kincaid considers the journey abroad as momentous in the development of the islander's identity. She suggests the islander "must leave home to find her own identity."

(Holmes 116) The journey caters to a finding of the islander's self through establishing the differences between home and abroad, creating a deeper appreciation for the island. An understanding of who the islander really is can be analyzed through comparisons outside of the homeland. The journey allows the islander to inhabit a space that removes all the comforts of home and she is faced with all that defines her. For the islander to "realize where home is, is to have had the experience of the 'home country,' and to find out where home really is."

(Balutansky 655) Leaving is a journey for self-fulfillment, success and self-discovery.

In Kincaid's *Annie John*, Annie's journey at 17 years old will take her to England where she will study to become a nurse. She experiences mixed emotions from the joy of escaping the island to the anxiety of leaving everything she knows behind. Annie did not "want to go to England, [she] did not want to be a nurse, but [she] would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with [her] life as it stood."

(Kincaid 130) Annie's desperation for something life altering compels her to grasp at any option to escape the monotonous life on the island. Leaving is an escape from poverty, ritualistic gendered roles, a hallowed emptiness, a desperate longing. Choosing a submissive life serving seven unruly men drastically enhances Annie's determination to leave the island. Her life was at a standstill, and the island could offer her no opportunity for growth, while in England she could become a nurse.



The journey abroad is also triggered by the prevalent racism in the islands. Racism in the Caribbean is never as simple as a black and white. With the varying racial blend of each island's population, there is a variation of social classes, majority and minority groups. Oppression is most significant within a race, where different hues are significant for different things. As a reflection of the hierarchy of slaves during slavery, the tension between lighter and darker skinned islanders still exist. Merle Hodge's Cynthia experiences hierarchy at school where the teachers "only pick the fair girls." (Hodge 83) As a darker skinned student, Cynthia realizes that being that hue puts her at a disadvantage in the islands. Her progression in society will be hindered by her appearance. Since she cannot change her skin's hue, she attempts to change her surroundings by leaving the island. Moving to a foreign land where even though racism exists on a grander scale, she will at least have greater mobility than what the island can afford her.

The island's rank in beauty, privilege, acceptance and advancement in society depends on the hue of the skin. With the history of the lighter slave becoming the house slave, the inferiority of darker skinned slave was established. Access to better food, education and better living conditions created a sense of dominance over the darker slaves. Genealogy also gives power to those of lighter hues because of their mixed ancestry with European blood. While other cultures believe that mixed ancestry taints the blood and has a negative connotation, most islanders see it as a rise in social standing. The lighter skinned islander attempts to carry on the European power established through ancestry. This becomes another driving force for darker skinned islanders who search for home and acceptance in a different land. The aim of leaving is to escape the oppression and social boundaries that limits individual growth and hope for a prosperous future. Going abroad provides an easy assimilation into a culture that has fought its battle against racism and the possibility for a successful life and prosperous future.

# THE MIGRANT

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Migration is a journey usually taken by a single party and very frequently encompasses the entire family unit. The fragmentation of the family structure results in the surrogacy of a maternal, a paternal or an entire familial connection. The sudden severance of relationships enhances a void for a homeland connection. "Caribbean outmigration does not consist of complete families migrating together. The notion of separation is always implicit in the discourse of participants and often explicitly articulated [through] effects on the migrant, effects on those left behind, and effects on family ties." (Mohammed 112) Separation impacts identity and there is often an overwhelming desire to belong or assimilate into the new surroundings. Family ties become strained and loyalty to homeland values and traditions are often compromised. Those left behind often view the migrant as detached, distant and view the migrant's transition necessary and inevitable. Children are affected the most from this separation of one or both parents migrating. While financial aid from parents abroad is of great benefit to the child, the abandonment causes a dire impact on social growth, family relationships and structure. The child envisions the foreign land not as the land that separates him from her parents but as the land that offers love and unity with her parents and financial acquisitions. The land where the money and goods that support survival come from, is interpreted as where the love comes from. Many children grow up with the longing of reaching the foreign land to partake in their family's prosperity and belong to a family unit in the land where the love is. "Many young people whose parents migrate simply await the day when they will themselves leave." (Mohammed 113) The future of children left behind is a one way view of escaping the island the island themselves to reunite and rebuild their family ties. Migration becomes the movement of entire families, one by one over a period of time to the foreign land that offers opportunity for them all. Jamaica Kincaid

understood this movement as the islander “finding the place [she is] born in, an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what [she is] familiar with, knowing it represents a haven.” (Kincaid 95) The foreign land presents itself as a haven to all, who sees it publicized as a land of great fortune and opportunity.

Fortune has always fascinated those on the islands. To be where the opportunity and money is instigated the migration to England and America. The ease and appeal of an elevated social status through migration created a massive one way flow of immigrants. Fascination with a foreign land grows from the oppression and poverty that is rampant in the islands. The lack of opportunity, progression, prosperity and self-fulfillment creates an unavoidable void. Being constantly bombarded with glamorized images of ‘citizens that have’, the citizens of the have-nots are reminded of their lacking. “From the romanticized wealth and glamour on *The Young and The Restless* to the perception of upward mobility of Blacks on *The Cosby Show*, impressions of life in North America are largely positive and always sensational.” (Mohammed 112) Television programming in the islands are often limited to one or two local channels and are heavily inundated with popular foreign shows. Soap operas, dramas and comedies tend to be the programs of choice and less included are documentaries and news broadcasts. The sensationalized images shown on television are far from the reality of the foreign land and are even further from the reality of the islander’s homeland. Watching the lives of others dwelling in prosperity initiates the islander’s hopes and dreams for a life that the island cannot offer. The tease from television programs offering products that are not readily available in the island creates a lustful want for materialistic gain. The lifestyle of people in soap operas such as *The Young and Restless* tells a story of rich and prosperous families who are well off and live in beautiful mansions. They are never seen struggling from paycheck to paycheck, trying to make

ends meet, which is often the reality of life for new immigrants, who do not migrate into rich and prosperous families and beautiful mansions. Life in the Cosby house consists of well respected, intelligent and financially stable parents, who were always home to solve the dilemmas of their children, attend social gatherings and were never seen at work. Television is a captivating lie and offers no reality to the life of an immigrant who has to deal with adjusting socially, financially and emotionally to a culture that is very different from her own. “The American media machine is a strong negative force on social cohesion and any sense of belonging to Caribbean society... Impressions of life in the metropolitan centers are based in part on the images they see on television and their perception of life in the metropole [which] inevitably has an impact on the migration decision.” (Mohammed 111-112) The influence on the islander by the captivating lives of the foreign media alters the islander’s view of her identity and sense of belonging.

Merle Hodge discusses the fascination with American culture with her character Manhatt’n.

“Manhatt’n was an individual who at some obscure date had ‘gone-away’. Some of the boys said he’d only been to Curacao where he’d get a job for a few months; one section of opinion had it that he’d merely worked down on the Base for a few weeks. Manhatt’n himself gave it out that he’d been up Stateside, fellers, up Amurraca-side – for he always spoke with his mouth screwed to one side and all the words coming out of his nose.” (Hodge 7) By giving Manhatt’n such a nickname, Hodge establishes the importance of New York City to the. To bear witness to someone who has ventured from the island and listen keenly to every word of their adventure, the islander becomes inundated with hopes and dreams of their own travels. Through stories and pictures, the islander is compelled to grasp onto a dream of a city of bright lights and grand dreams. A city that promises financial and self enrichment, Manhattan, the cultural, financial and commercial capital of the United States, if not the world, is the most desired place to be. As its

famous staple saying goes “If you make it here, you can make it anywhere”, Manhattan is the city that challenges and builds one’s character, intellect and wealth. Its deliberate misspelling highlights the dreamer’s idiocy, simple mindedness and inept desire by association.

Hodge’s ambivalence of the character’s visit to Manhattan shows the unimportance of actually going to a specific place but stresses the importance of going away in general. To escape the island, Hodge puts the character in the position of an author, fiction or nonfiction. The act of leaving, to Curacao or even the base, allows him to create a world that fellow islanders can either mock or be impressed by. However, to become so heavily influenced by a dream or an actual visit criticizes the character’s loyalty to who he truly is. The novelty of a new world perspective is heavily inundated with changes in mannerisms, speech, attitude and expressions. The character adapts a nasal-like speech to express his adventures depicting his dominance in sex, culture and the law. Accounts of him outdrawing a sheriff in Dodge City, the stalker blond and sex with the red-head while indulging in martinis and caviar, is an attempt to relate to the islanders, events that they will never experience, giving him an elevated social standing. The islander, through her journey is afforded an escape from the limitations of the island. The islander is provided a new beginning as soon as her foot reaches the new land.

Upon arrival, everything about the islander is changed. She is now labeled a migrant and is given an identity based on the migrants before her. The continuous stream of migrants has created a very large but inconspicuous population where the islanders have long gone unnoticed because of their uncanny resemblance to Black Americans. A great advantage is the access to an established and fully thriving culture that in some ways are not that far off from their own. While close resemblance offers for easy assimilation, it also quickly robs the migrant of her identity. This close physical resemblance can be traced back to the days of slavery, when slave ships

would pass through the Caribbean leaving some slaves there before continuing to the Americas and Europe with the others. Caribbean people were one stop from becoming Black Americans or Black Europeans, which makes the Caribbean native closer to her African roots while being further away from economic advancement. Her identity is less infiltrated, more African in culture and tradition while also further away from assimilation into the prosperous New World. The migrant's struggle with identity includes this displacement of historical ancestry. Attempting to relegate the past onto the present proves to be a difficult feat especially when the past of the foreign land is similar but different from that of the homeland. Slavery and Racism existed in both locals but on different magnitudes creating a stark difference in the migrant's and the foreigner's perception of the past and their present relationship to it.

Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy experiences race relations on a train ride through the country with Mariah, her white boss. The uncomfortable episode she describes is enhanced by her unfamiliarity with the black servants.

“The other people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked liked mine. The people who looked like my relatives were all older men and very dignified, as if they were emerging from a church after Sunday service. On closer observation, they were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always gave backchat. Mariah did not seem to notice what she had in common with the other diners, or what I had in common with the waiters.” (Kincaid 32)

The power Lucy shows in denying association with the Black English servants is reinforced by her relatives' tendency to give “backchat” to the white diners. The Caribbean influence of being the majority race resonates and has a major impact on Lucy's race relations, power dynamic and work ethics. The familiarity she feels towards them is only through their physical features, which draws upon their common African ancestry but ends there. Jamaica Kincaid describes her

personal experience with race when she first came to America as an easy transition where “most people looked like me, so I wasn’t too concerned with the color of my skin...I was not used to American racial attitudes, so whenever they were directed at me I did not recognize them, and if I didn’t recognize them they were meaningless.” (Bonetti 4) Kincaid’s ambivalence to race is one many migrants can relate to. Not understanding foreign race structures blinds the migrant to the racial stigmas around her. The move for the migrant from an island where the majority is of the same race to a foreign neighborhood that is also the majority does not create a huge transition for the migrant. Kincaid expresses having no feelings about her or her color. She stated: “I’m sure people denied me things because of the color of my skin, but I didn’t know it, so I just went on. That was not my problem.” (Bonetti 4) Dealing with race in the foreign land is usually easy for the migrant who doesn’t get bombarded with the racial tensions of the foreign land. She comes to the foreign land blinded by her own majority status and often misses numerous racial insinuations. The more obvious racial connotations are either met with hatred, disgust or a disowning of the Black foreigners struggle. Lucy reaction to Mariah’s comment is a great example of her disassociation from the Black European race tension.

Early that morning, Mariah left her own compartment to come and tell me that we were passing through some of those freshly plowed fields she loved so much. She drew up my blind, and when I saw mile after mile of turned –up earth, I said, a cruel tone to my voice, “Well, thank God I dint have to do that.” I don’t know if she understood what I meant for in that one statement I meant different things. ( Kincaid 33)

Lucy’s reaction to the miles of upturned earth brings to the surface an inner conflict with her ancestral identity. As a descendant of slaves, Lucy is aware of the brutality of her history but chooses to disassociate herself from its pain. The anger Lucy experiences is towards Mariah’s

naivety at the labor required to manifest “those freshly plowed fields she loved so much.”

(Kincaid 33) The years of slave labor in fields are still apart of Lucy’s identity, one that Mariah seems to ignore. Mariah’s sense of beauty in a history of pain and torture, attempts to diminish the importance of slavery and the impact it has on Lucy’s identity. However, Lucy’s attempt to also disassociate herself from the Black European struggle by thanking God she didn’t have to do plough the fields. Her ancestors are from the islands and that’s where her loyalty lies. Not knowing if Mariah understood what she meant and the lack of interest to explain it also suggest Lucy’s avoidance of accepting the burden of a foreign race problem as her own.

The migrant becomes very defensive whenever she is called ‘black’. The lack of her ethnic group on government or survey forms forces her to chooses either ‘OTHER’ or ‘BLACK’, both of which he is not. The migrant is forced into protecting her individuality even now more than ever. Facing the masses of the foreign land, the migrant identifies with being grouped as Caribbean, but amongst fellow Caribbean natives, her nationality is often declared, highlighted and represented. The nationalistic cling to an individual identity emphasizes the notion to always want to represent, to wave the flag unnecessarily, to show off as a cultural piece to others, which is a desperate attempt to retain some attachment to home. For the migrant to be Caribbean in a land that only sees Black creates an identity crisis. The offense of being called ‘Black’ or the anger at the unavailability of ‘Caribbean’ on ethnicity forms, suggests a strong possessiveness over the homeland. It compels the immigrant to fight for the last strand of her identity before she gets swallowed up by the masses. By the looks of her, she is African-American, but that’s not who she is. The immigrant is bombarded with questions of her identity which triggers a cultural crave to remain the same. Food, music, language and traditions from the homeland become



exotic treasures in the immigrant's life and while these substitutions may not satisfy the void, it keeps him hanging on.

Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* explores the concept of misplaced identities. Suggie's choice to cook saltfish, a Caribbean delicacy, in her Brooklyn apartment, reflects her loyalty to an island tradition. "From the way she held the bowl in her palm and solemnly scooped up the food she might have been home in Barbados, eating in the doorway of the small house perched like a forlorn bird on a hillside." (Marshall 17-18) Cooking and eating in the doorway brought Suggie back to a place where this behavior was customary. This was a ritual, a homage to an experience she could no longer partake in. Her actions were strange to Brooklyn and she was aware of the opposition from others, especially those from her own homeland. Suggie's decision not to partake in foreign customs and abandon her own is seen as an act of rebellion to those who believe complete assimilation is the only way to survive. "The smell of Suggie's codfish hung in a dead weight, and [Deighton] hurried downstairs, afraid that the smell would insinuate itself into his clothes and he would carry it with him all night as the undisputable sign that he was Barbadian and a foreigner." (Marshall 22) The smell would tarnish his reputation and force him to claim an identity he was trying to suppress. With disgust, many Caribbean immigrants attempt to disassociate themselves from their Caribbean traditions. The belief that the traditions, dialect, accents, and cultural influences stereotype Caribbean natives as ignorant, exotic, uneducated and foreign, dissuade many from a natural loyalty to home.

The attempt at complete assimilation is achieved by many who covet social mobility and financial gains. Through hard work and dedication to fulfilling the dream of foreign prosperity, Caribbean Nationals have achieved a high rate of success. A dedication to fulfilling this dream, instilled since childhood, creates a meticulous immigrant work ethic. With either the ambition of

enhancing the social mobility of those left behind or establishing a place for themselves in a new land, the Caribbean immigrant works hard often starting from nothing. Very few arrive in the foreign land with any asset and therefore work is embraced as the only source of success and prosperity. The migrant possesses a dedicated work ethic where jobs are confined to a limited number of occupations. Because racism still exists, the migrant's employment opportunities are concentrated to the service industries and small businesses. The adjustment is easier in hospitality because of the tourism industry and the nuclear family structure of the islands. "The lucky ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners – each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day's work." (Marshall 11) The migrant work ethic comes from a place where the migrant has nothing and will not let anything hinder her progress. The ability to earn higher wages than what is earned in the homeland influences the drive for success and fulfillment of the migrant's dreams.

The migrant's success is measured by the acquisition of the material possession fantasized about in the homeland. Having her own part of the 'American dream' means the migrant must work diligently and efficiently to own a car, have a fulfilling career and owning a house. Owning a car offers a sense of mobility creating more opportunities for jobs, access to better neighborhoods and social mobility. Having a fulfilling career to the migrant is based on the restitution of the job and not necessarily the satisfaction of the career field. Suggie's joy of being home on the weekends where she can cook her Barbadian cuisine and enjoy the company of others is overshadowed by the upcoming Monday where "she would return to the country, to the sleeping-in job and the insolence of white children, to the lonely room under the high roof." (Marshall 18) The migrant job choice is affected by the foreign land's racism against the

minority group to obtain high paying position and the migrant's dedication to succeed. The migrant often attends educational institutions to obtain the foreign land's approval for higher paying positions creating greater mobility and foreign acceptance.

Home ownership is the ultimate act of validation for the migrant. Whether the acquisition of a home is in the foreign land or in the island, the owning of a permanent residence is a rooting of the migrant's ... Home ownership for the migrant is an asset that signifies the accumulation of the American dream; the ultimate reward of the migrant's journey abroad. As a homeowner, the migrant becomes a resident of the foreign land and has carved a permanent place for herself and her future children. As the title *Brown Girl, Brownstones* suggest, homeownership is a migrant's token of success among their own islanders and even more blacks and whites. The migrant's aspiration to have it all drives the self-motivation and pride for achievement. The impact of foreign accommodations on the migrant's life also influences her drive to succeed. Lucy's declaration on the luxuries she was introduced to in England was a major reason for her dedication to become successful. "I had spent my entire life not knowing the luxury of plumbing, hot and cold tap water, the privacy to be had by closing the door and taking off your clothes and stepping into a bathtub and staying there for as long as it pleased you." (Kincaid 146)

The amazement of foreign luxuries captivates the hearts of many migrants whose living conditions were not accommodating. New services used to enhance comfort such as hot running water and privacy from a bathroom door, for Lucy was another push to accept this new land as one of greatness. The numerous perks and advantages of a greatly developed nation sway the migrant's hold on the joys of home. The migrant is now confronted with all that was lacking and all that was wrong in the homeland. The migrant is in awe of all technological and societal advances and becomes captivated by the superficial happiness. "Everything I was experiencing –

the ride in the elevator, being in an apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator- was such a good idea that I could imagine I would grow used to it and like it very much.” (Kincaid 4) Access to innovations that seem to foreigners as necessary tools for survival forces the migrant to now question her own existence without them. Lucy cannot imagine a life without all the things that has come to make her existence enjoyable, even though she existed prior to them. The superficial happiness with new goods and services is a temporary fix to a persistent void that only the real thing can fix. The void created when the migrant leaves home is one the emigrant cannot escape. Through pictures, food and other things that enhance memories, the migrant is reminded of a missing homeland. “The curtains at my window had loud, showy flowers printed on them; I had chosen this pattern over a calico that the lady in the cloth store had recommended. It did look vulgar in this climate, but it would have been just right in the climate I came from.” (Kincaid 144) The curtain Lucy uses when she finally is on her own is a representation of her Caribbean identity which she tries to hold onto. A symbol of the fauna of the island, Lucy attempts to reconnect to the land she has lost. Even though she expresses her joy of being away from her family, she still makes gestures that connect her to the homeland. She states: “I was now living a life I had always wanted to live. I was living apart from my family in a place where no one knew much about me; almost no one knew even my name, and I was free more or less to come and go as pleased me. The feeling of bliss, the feeling of happiness, the feeling of longing fulfilled that I had thought would come with this situation was nowhere to be found inside me.” (Kincaid 158) The emptiness she describes is a longing that can only be regained when she returns to the homeland. She has everything she dreams of but there is still a void that nothing in the foreign land can fill.

# THE RETURNEE

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A persistent void exists for the migrant who has been in the foreign land. Whether her endeavors are successful or not, there is a longing for home that only returning home can fill. Success through hard work denotes the migrant's desire for "the notion of something called 'betterment' ... [A] term intended to encompass a set of motivations including the search for better jobs and wages and higher education" which are opportunities lacked by the homeland. (Mohammed 111) Hard work in the homeland is often met with poor remuneration and forces talented and intelligent islanders to seek a space where growth, exploration, innovation and remuneration can be achieved. The islander's desire is "to go abroad, make some money and return to [the] homeland. For some, returning at retirement to enjoy 'clean living' or the beauty of their homeland was an ideal. For some of the younger ones, it was to return to the homeland to allow their children to be raised in what were seen to be wholesome surroundings compared to the metropole. But, whatever the scheme contemplated, at the heart of the decision is the idea that economic prosperity would depend on that initial journey abroad." (Mohammed 111) The journey created an opportunity for self-improvement but the emptiness that persists cannot be solved with monetary gain.

Paule Marshall explains the return home as "absolutely necessary for the reintegration of that which was lost in our collective historical past and the many national pasts which comprise it." (Williams 53) An appreciation or longing for home can only be achieved once the aspiration, realization and disappointment are met. The character has to make a voyage, has to have a grand experienced, has to have attempted something life-altering and have to have either failed or succeeded to now know what to strive for next. "In the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to..." (Kincaid 7).

The problem that many characters encounter is that the fulfillment of their dream cannot satisfy the high that had accumulated in its quest. Nothing can satisfy the void initially created by the attempts of a greater life, and the character is forced to face the reality of what home represents. Not so much the failures or success of the new land, but missing the comforts of home is what usually triggers the longing to return. Not returning is the option often chosen by young women who have no children or property in the homeland. The detachment is easier and the hope of creating a more rewarding life abroad is sought. There is also a lingering resentment for the land that never nurtured them as a child, but ensured their future can only be prosperous if they sought a future elsewhere. When longing for her homeland, Lucy stated:

But now I, too, felt that I wanted to be back where I came from... What a surprise this was to me, that I longed to be back in the place that I came from, that I longed to sleep in a bed I had outgrown, that I longed to be with people whose smallest, most natural gesture would call up in me such a rage that I longed to see them all dead at my feet.  
(Kincaid 6)

Lucy expresses a great desire to return to things that were once the reason for her longing to leave. She has found comfort in the things she once despised, suggesting the emptiness she once searched for could not be found in new places and new dreams. Filling the void can only be accomplished by facing your past and creating a space to endure; there is no escaping it. The longing and wanting is what drives a person to do the thing she does. The expectation of a reward keeps the drive and the motivation constant. The picture becomes a focus point of the hope and dreams and captures the person's imagination. Reality is not so fulfilling. Even after achieving the goal, the success is often short-lived and not as time consuming as the journey to getting. The quest becomes more fulfilling than the reward.

Patricia Powell, a Jamaican writer, explained her relationship with the homeland as one of “deep ambivalence and contradictions.” She stated:

I guess being a Jamaican writer may have more to do with my own sense of identity. Even though I am an American citizen and, as far as I know, don't intend to go back to Jamaica to live, I still feel like a Jamaican. I haven't lost that even though I've lived here longer than I've lived in Jamaica... Maybe it's my grappling with identity that still lodges me as a Jamaican. And because I write about the Caribbean or because I set my work there, that further tags me.... It's a home that is not a comfortable place.” (Chin 533-545)

Powell's feelings of ambivalence are one expressed by many migrants who feel their sense of identity has been compromised by the intertwining of a homeland and a foreign culture. The uneasy feeling of a home that cannot be regained complicates the search for a pure identity. Powell's experience with living in the U.S longer than she has lived in Jamaica, provides her with the opportunity for full assimilation into the foreign culture. Yet, she still feels obligated to the nationalistic cling of the Caribbean. The island's society does not cater to the islander's need. Jamiaca Kincaid suggests leaving the homeland is inevitable and was necessary for her success as a writer. “It's no accident that most West Indian writers do not live in the West Indies all the time. It's their source of art, but they can't live there. The place is full of the most sewer-like corruption you ever saw... You couldn't make a living there, you couldn't be supported economically, to begin with.” (Bonetti 3) Many Caribbean authors share Powell's complicated relationship with the homeland. The lack of progression and opportunity for growth prevent writers from living there fulltime. “The women from the Caribbean who have been able to produce prolifically live in metropolitan countries.” (Baluntansky 651) Caribbean authors write for a foreign audience, not for inhabitants of the homeland. Their success is based on the foreign market which dictates where they live and access work contributing to the support and

continuous pull of the foreign land. They write about a home that they are not completely immersed in which offers a recreating, reconnecting and rewriting of the homeland. "Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home" (Conde 2). The cycle of the islander to the returnee will continue because of the economic instability of the islands. The migration will flow heavily towards a new land with only a trickle returning to establish the homeland. The migrant's quest for identity continues as the diaspora widens.



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